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## Responsible Drinking: For Yourself and Your Shipmates

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U.S. Navy Chief Master-at-Arms James Blagg and Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Richard Grier, command prevention advisors, hang a banner at Naval Air Station Key West, Fla. (U.S. Navy photo by Trice I

As summer kicks off, many of us start planning beach trips and barbeques, but it's also Drink Responsibly Month – a good time to consider your drinking habits and take steps to avoid irresponsible alcohol consumption. Choosing to drink alcohol is not a bad thing, but if done carelessly it can quickly lead to risky situations and serious consequences.

As Sailors, we are taught to protect three things: ourselves, our shipmates and our ship. Following this credo is critical to the safety of fellow Sailors, the success of the mission and the readiness of the Navy. It may seem like a small task, but by choosing to drink responsibly

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you are safeguarding your own career and the well-being of your fellow Sailors.

## Common Alcohol Misconceptions

As a Chief Petty Officer with past experience in the Fleet, I have personally witnessed time and time again the tragic influence of alcohol misconceptions amongst our Sailors. Socializing at local bars, drinking games and rounds of drinks to celebrate accomplishments were common among my shipmates, and unfortunately so were these false impressions:

- “I’m almost 21 so it’s ok to drink a little.”
- “I’ve only had a few drinks, I’m okay to drive.”
- “We’re only a few miles from base, it’s ok to drive back.”
- “I drove here and I have no other way to get home.”
- “I’m not going to get caught.”

These statements are simply not true. Underage drinking is illegal and potential consequences include fines, jail time and/or community service. Regardless of how you feel, just one drink starts to impair your judgment, visual function and ability to multitask. Also, over time some people experience a decreased sensitivity to alcohol and do not feel intoxicated; yet their blood alcohol content (BAC) continues to rise and they may be considered legally impaired while not feeling drunk.

The bottom line is that the consequences are serious. In addition to the potential physical dangers, Sailors involved in alcohol incidents face:

- Loss of rank or pay
- Separation from the Navy
- Civilian consequences, such as fines and jail time

Whether you’re driving one-half mile or 100 miles, it’s never safe to drive under the influence. Programs are available that offer safe rides home and do not result in disciplinary action. During my time aboard the USS Harry S. Truman, the First Class Petty Officer Association noticed that some Sailors were either unaware of or not taking advantage of an existing taxi program. As a result, we worked through the chain of command to institute Truman 456, a confidential program that connects Sailors who have been drinking with a safe ride home from fellow shipmates “on duty” as sober drivers. To find out if a program like this exists on your ship, and to understand your other options for safe rides home, talk to your Coalition of Sailors Against Destructive Decisions (CSADD) chapter or reach out to a Drug and Alcohol Programs Advisor (DAPA).

## Tips for Drinking Responsibly

The easiest way to avoid a potentially risky situation is to skip alcohol altogether. If you know you’ll be drinking, consider the following:

- **Keep Track:** Know your limit before you start drinking and pay attention to how many drinks you consume. USDA guidelines recommend a maximum of one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.
- **Slow Down:** Drink at your own pace. It’s not a competition – trying to “keep up” with

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others could push you over your limit.

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• **Plan Ahead:** Before going out to socialize or to an event where you will be drinking alcohol, make sure you are fully aware of your ride options and have a back-up plan in place. Planning ahead can eliminate the potential of putting yourself and your shipmates in a position of risk.

## Responsibility Is a Sign of Strength

It's so important for Sailors to realize that reaching out for help and/or using the resources available are not signs of weakness. Developing a plan of action is a sign of responsibility and maturity. Reaching out for help is a sign of honor and courage, and responsible drinking shows respect for yourself, your shipmates and your ship.

For more information on responsible drinking, visit the [Navy's "Keep What You've Earned" campaign](#) or [NMCPHC's Preventing Drug Abuse and Excessive Alcohol Use campaign](#).

*Editor's note: Chief Lindsay is the Leading Chief Petty Officer of NMCPHC's Expeditionary Platforms, managing the Forward Deployable Preventive Medicine Unit (FDPMU), and previously served aboard the USS Harry S. Truman.*

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